

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



June 2009

The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

THE VA HANDBOOK "FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS, DEPENDENTS AND SURVIVORS" (2009 EDITION)

is available on-line at www.va.gov/opa/feature/index.asp. The 164-page handbook provides the latest information on important changes in eligibility for VA medical care and benefits. It describes other federal benefits, including education, disability compensation, pension, home loan guaranty, vocational rehabilitation, life insurance and burial assistance. 2009 marks the addition of "Survivors" to the title as well as details on the Post-9/11 GI Bill signed into law in 2008.

Paper copies may be purchased for \$5.00 per copy (including postage and handling) by mail to U. S. Government Printing Office, PO Box 979050, St. Louis MO 63197-9000 with a check payable to "Superintendent of Documents;" by calling (toll-free) 866-512-1800; or on-line at bookstore.gpo.gov. Visa, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express credit cards are accepted.

ONE-TIME PAYMENTS UNDER THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT

The economic recovery legislation, signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009, provides for a one-time payment of \$250.00 to eligible VA beneficiaries. An eligible VA beneficiary is an individual who, for any month during the 3-month period ending with January 2009, is entitled to a compensation or pension payment payable under VA Compensation (includes benefits for persons disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation); Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (including Parents' DIC); Pension, live and death, and Medal of Honor Pension; and children of Vietnam and certain Korean veterans born with spina bifida, and children of women Vietnam veterans born with certain birth defects.

Individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income, Social Security, and Railroad Retirement benefits are also eligible for the payment. However, an individual shall be paid only one payment under this legislation, regardless of whether the individual is entitled or eligible under more than one program.

These payments are made only to individuals who reside in one of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, or the Northern Mariana Islands. The determination of the individual's residence is based on the individual's current address of record under the applicable program.

No application is necessary. VA certifies the individuals entitled to receive payments and provides the Treasury with the information needed to disburse such payments. A certification of an individual shall be unaffected by any subsequent determination or redetermination of the individual's entitlement to, or eligibility for, a benefit.

Payments are not made if, for the most recent month of such individual's entitlement in the three month period such individual's benefit was not payable, or was reduced, by reason of incarceration for a felony or fugitive felon status; or in the case of any individual whose date of death occurs before the date on which the individual is certified to receive a payment.

A payment under this section shall not be regarded as income and shall not be regarded as a resource for the month of receipt and the following 9 months, for purposes of determining the eligibility of the recipient (or the recipient's spouse or family) for benefits or assistance, or the amount or extent of benefits or assistance, under any Federal program or under any State or local program financed in whole or in part with Federal funds. A payment under this section shall not be considered as gross income for purposes of the Federal Income Tax.

In any case in which an individual who is entitled to a payment and whose benefit payment or cash benefit is paid to a representative payee or fiduciary, the payment shall be made to the individual's representative payee or fiduciary and the entire payment shall be used only for the benefit of the individual who is entitled to the payment.

VA has sent letters to those who have been certified to receive the one-time payments. The payments will be released during June, 2009.

CHANGES TO THE PRIORITY GROUP 8 ENROLLMENT RESTRICTION

(<http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/eligibility/PG8Relaxation.asp>) In 2003, VA made the difficult decision to stop enrolling new Priority Group 8 (high income) veterans in order to assure all veterans are provided timely and quality medical care. New regulations take effect on June 15, 2009 that will allow VA to reopen enrollment healthcare to veterans whose household income does not exceed the current VA income thresholds (means test threshold and/or geographical means test threshold) by more than 10%. More than 266,000 veterans may now be eligible for enrollment.

In the cases of veterans who applied for enrollment on or after January 1, 2009 and were denied enrollment because their income exceeded the VA income threshold, VA will determine if they are eligible under this new rule, once the new regulations take effect. Those veterans will not need to submit another application for enrollment.

Veterans who are eligible under this new rule will be notified by mail. They will receive letters from the VA Health Eligibility Center notifying them of their eligibility for enrollment and welcoming them to the VA health care system. Included with the letter will be instructions for getting care and how to obtain a Veterans Identification Card.

Those veterans who applied but were rejected for enrollment prior to January 1, 2009 and who believe their income would fall within the new thresholds should reapply. The reason why they should reapply is that the enrollment determination will be based on their 2008 income data.

VA has developed an enrollment calculator which will help veterans in determining if their income falls within the new 10% income threshold guidelines. Once all required information has been entered, this calculator will determine if the veteran may be eligible for enrollment under the new rule. The calculator is on-line at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/apps/enrollmentcalculator/>.

VA WELCOMING VETS HOME WITH NEW WEB SITE, BLOG (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched its new “Returning Veterans” Web site -- www.oefoif.va.gov -- to welcome home veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with a social, veteran-centric Web site focusing on their needs and questions.

The Web site will feature videos, veteran stories, and a blog where veterans are encouraged to post feedback.

The site also will restructure the traditional index-of-benefits format found on other VA pages into question-based, categorized, and easily navigated links by topic. This will allow veterans to find benefits of interest easily and discover related benefits as they explore.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office: www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

“Florida Vets First:” www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov